

Chapter 10

The Present and the Future of Polish Coastal Music Festivals

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In this chapter I present the history of three Polish popular music festivals, Open'er in Gdynia, Audioriver in Płock and Jazz na Molo (Jazz on the Pier) in Sopot, all taking place near the sea or a river. I also examine how they cater for their audiences and sustain themselves and speculate about their future, taking into account factors which are conducive for their survival and expansion and those which might negatively affect their sustainability and development. In my research I draw on the history of music festivals in Poland and the current situation of music and other festivals in this country, captured by the term 'festivalisation'. I draw on academic work on festivals, conducted in Poland and elsewhere, as well as information about festivals distributed by the media, including their websites. I also use interviews with their organisers and participants, as well as my own experience of attending two of them.

Popular music festivals in Poland of state socialism

After the Second World War Eastern European countries and Poland especially experienced the decimation of music venues, and nationalisation of the remaining ones, as well as subjecting them to centralised planning, governed by ideological principles rather than income generation. However, the more years that passed since WWII and Stalinism, the more spaces (literal and figurative) were created for the consumption of popular music. The watershed was the 1960s, when several popular music festivals were set up in Poland, which proved important cultural events, beginning with the International Music Festival in Sopot, in 1960 (in the years 1977-1980 the Intervision Music Festival), the Festival of Polish Songs in Opole, existing officially from 1963, the Festival of Soviet Songs in Zielona Góra, from 1965 and the Festival of Army Songs, first in Połczyn-Zdrój and then Kołobrzeg, from 1967. Their coming into existence in this decade can be explained by a change in the approach and style of governing by the political authorities: from highly ideological to technocratic. According to the new approach, the main goal of the authorities was not so much to turn the masses into a community of socialist 'new men and women', but to make them content enough not to question the system. Providing entertainment, which could be tightly planned and monitored, was an important means to this end and popular music festivals fulfilled this requirement

(Kienzler 2015: 317; Sankowski 2016). Therefore, the audience *watched* these state socialist festivals, either in person, sitting on benches in large amphitheatres rather than participating in them more actively by dancing to the music's rhythm. Not surprisingly, the festivals were criticised by Polish intellectual elites for their low quality and turning people away from political activities (Kisielewski, quoted in Bittner 2017: 143). However, they were truly popular; almost everybody who lived in Poland during their existence, myself included, was familiar with their format and their winners thanks to them being broadcast by television in the most attractive slots (Kończak 2007: 71).

Apart from providing entertainment, the festivals played a specific political role, such as strengthening patriotic feelings, promoting friendship with the Soviet Union, drawing attention to the importance of the Polish army and legitimising the postwar borders of Poland. For the last reason the most important festivals were set up on the so-called 'regained territories' (which previously belonged to Germany), in towns such as Opole, Zielona Góra, Sopot and Kołobrzeg (Kienzler 2015: 317). The targeted audience, with the exception of the Sopot Festival, was Polish; there was no expectation that there would be many international visitors coming to these events. They were usually organised by regional authorities with the support of national institutions, most importantly television and the ministry of culture which, in effect, were accountable to the Party's executive. They took place on one stage, as usually a given town or city had only one stage suitable for the festival and because this ensured that they were easier to plan and monitor. Such a format was also most convenient for television transmission. Popular television presenters, such as Lucjan Kydryński, Krystyna Loska and Grażyna Torbicka were employed to present at these events and they became festival stars in their own right. The peak of their popularity was in the 1970s, which coincided with investment into Polish television under the chairman Maciej Szczepański. Szczepański was into pomp and spectacle and music festivals, especially the Sopot Festival, were the perfect outlet of his grandiose ambitions (Krajowski 2018).

These festivals were theme rather than genre-focused, as conveyed by their names: festivals of Polish, Soviet and Army songs. Although, in principle, representatives of different genres could participate in them, in practice they favoured pop or more exactly estrada singers over rockers. By the same token, they were friendly towards female performers, as women dominated this type of music. They also appealed to older audiences and families, as this was a typical audience of estrada music. To ensure that, their tickets were moderately priced, although in the case of some festivals in the 1980s, especially the

Sopot and Opole festivals, this had changed - the prices of festival tickets went up considerably.

Although throughout the 1970s and the 1980s the number of festivals in Poland increased and diversified, including some rock festivals, most importantly Jarocin Festival, which started in 1970 under the name Wielkopolskie Rhythms of Youth, by the time the Berlin Wall fell their number was still low in comparison with western countries and the bulk of them were large festivals, appealing to a broad audience. Small, niche festivals were rare and many genres which became popular in Poland at the time, such as electronic and dance music, did not have their own festivals. This meant considerable room for expansion which indeed took place over the next three decades.

Festivalisation of popular music after the fall of the Iron Curtain

After the Fall of the Iron Curtain, and especially after 2000, we observe a mushrooming of music festivals in Poland, similarly as a significant growth of other types of festivals, such as film and theatre festivals, as well as mega and interdisciplinary festivals. In step with western scholars (Bennett, Taylor and Woodward 2014), in the 2010s Polish critics started to talk about festivalisation of Polish cultural life (Kuligowski 2013; Pęczak 2013). This term implies not merely the proliferation of festivals, but also their incorporation into a wider range of cultural events and the subordination of cultural life of a given locality to the festival calendar.

There is no verifiable information about how many music festivals currently take place in Poland, because there is no central register or systematic research devoted to them. Moreover, the situation is dynamic with new festivals appearing on the map every year and some disappearing, and the division between music and other festivals, as well as between festivals and music events of different types, is blurred. Nevertheless, Wikipedia lists about 200 music festivals in Poland (including those presenting classical music), while in the existing academic literature I found the number 220 (Pęczak 2013: 25); this is also a range corroborated by some organisers of music festivals I approached. The number is at least ten times higher than under state socialist rule, but still rather low in comparison with countries such as Hungary, where every year there are approximately 400-600 festivals offering live music. What, apart from quantity, differentiates the Polish music festivals of the postcommunist period (which I will label new Polish festivals) from those which took place when the Iron Curtain separated the East from the West (old festivals)? The main differences

pertain to four aspects: organisation and financing, purpose, approach to the audience and relation with the media. The artistic directors of new festivals are not accountable to the central political authorities as the Festivals of Soviet or Army Songs used to be. Centrally exerted control and censorship practically does not apply to them. Instead, they depend on the financial and logistical support of regional and local authorities, as well as private sponsors, such as national and local businesses. This is reflected in including these sponsors in promotional materials, posters and logos of the festivals. From this perspective, new Polish music festivals are no different from their western counterparts, which also rely on sponsorship for their survival and sustainability (Anderton 2015).

The focus of the old festivals was on winning a coveted award. By contrast, the new festivals often do not have any competition for participants and even if they do, they are of little importance. The most important aspect of the festival is to showcase stars, representing a specific genre or upcoming artists and create a space where the audience can meet and bond with like-minded people. This explains the change in the line-ups of Polish music festivals. While in the old festivals the vast majority of performers were Polish, the new festivals privilege foreign performers or balance Polish with foreign acts.

This affects the third aspect: the audience. The audience of the old festivals tended to be ephemeral and did not form a strong and lasting connection with fellow festival-goers because the experience was limited to attending a concert, and sitting on a bench did not allow for close interactions with other attendees. It was also typically an older audience, due to the privileging of estrada performers. By contrast, the new festivals, whose audience lives on the festival camp, experience the festivals for a much longer and more intense period, having an opportunity to meet fellow fans on the way to the showers or during the morning cigarettes. The bulk of the visitors are standing and dancing rather than sitting, which also facilitates a closer interaction with other attendees. From this perspective, again Polish festivals are not very different from the festivals elsewhere (Tjora 2016; Brown and Knox 2017). Furthermore, many of the new festivals, especially the large ones, try to appeal to international visitors. This is reflected in them having websites and printed programmes in English or German, as well as in Polish, informing potential visitors how to reach the festival from the nearest airport or even having names appealing to foreigners, such as Open'er, Castle Party, Audioriver, SoundEdit, Off Festival and Plötzlich am Meer. The audience is also influenced by ticket prices. While a minority of the festivals are free, the price of tickets for the most popular festivals are between 100 and 150 Euros. This is less than the cost of

attending the most popular European Festivals, such as Glastonbury, but high compared with Polish circumstances and puts off people on modest incomes and families. The pricing of tickets also favours committed visitors, who want to stay for the whole duration, as often tickets for one day or for a specific concert are not available and even if they are, the difference between the ticket for the entire festival and a day entrance is small. In summary, the new festivals, through their organisation, line-ups and ticket prices prioritise younger, more affluent and committed visitors (Piasecka 2012) and try their best to attract foreign visitors. In this respect Polish festivals are not different from their counterparts across Eastern Europe. In particular, one can identify many similarities between Open'er and Sziget Festival in Hungary (Szemere 2017; Győri 2019).

Unlike the old festivals, which belonged to the age of television, the new festivals belong to the age of the internet. Almost all of them have professional websites where one can find information and buy tickets. They do not care to be televised and do not adjust their ways to television transmission. By contrast, social media and websites specialising in popular music such as *Vice*, are crucial to the dissemination of information, as well as being their patrons and sponsors.

Pros and cons of new Polish festivals

The domination of Polish musical life by festivals attracts differing opinions. The advocates praise Polish music festivals for being well-organised, reasonably priced and safe, given that till this point Poland does not have any problems with terrorism or hate crime. If anything, the organisers complain that the local media unhelpfully create an atmosphere of fear by constantly drawing attention to loss of life and accidents at foreign musical events, in cities such as Paris and Manchester (Kiełbasa 2017). Moreover, festivals add dynamism to the social and cultural life of a given locality, especially small provincial towns which otherwise would not exist on the cultural map of Poland. By the same token, they increase the attractiveness of such places to tourists and in the further instance to the local economy. It is worth emphasising that arguably the best Polish popular music festivals do not take place in the metropolitan cities, such as Warsaw and Krakow, but in the provinces. They help transform Poland from a backward country, relying on manufacturing to become a modern one, whose wealth is based on knowledge and creative industries. This is especially the case of towns and cities which in the past were associated with industrial production, such as Katowice, which used to be one of the centres of coalmining in Poland and which in the last

decade successfully branded itself as a ‘city of festivals’ (Majchrzak, Matulewski and Makohonienko 2015). From the perspective of visitors to festivals, their attractiveness lies in giving a chance to watch many attractive performers in one space in a short span of time (Piasecka 2012), thus saving them the costs of travelling to see their favourite artists in far-away places. This is true about all successful festivals due to their economies of scale, as mentioned in the introduction, but for Polish audiences it is especially the case due to the fact that during state socialism and in the first decade after its fall the global stars rarely visited Poland.

Festivals also help to build communities of like-minded people who visit festivals and they promote positive values such as peace, caring for others and valuing culture, as opposed to giving in to materialistic pursuits. From this perspective special attention should be granted to Przystanek Woodstock (Woodstock Festival Poland), later renamed Pol’and’Rock Festival, a free festival which is an extension of a charity initiative Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy (the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity), fronted by Jurek Owsiak, the most successful ‘charity entrepreneur’ in Poland, initially as a way to thank people who supported his initiatives. Although festivals are, by their very nature, ephemeral affairs, they often lead to more sustained initiatives, such as setting up foundations which develop culture in a given locality.

When looking at criticism of festivals, taking place in Poland, we should discern criticism of festivalisation at large, and the specificity of the Polish approach to festivals. Some critics note that in the long term festivalisation is not good for the development of culture in Poland, because it leads to moving resources away from institutions offering culture all-year round, such as theatres and cinemas, to festivals; from culture understood as a way of living everyday life to culture experienced as something extraordinary (Kuligowski 2013; Skalska 2015). Moreover, contrary to the perception that festivals are apolitical and promote non-materialistic life, in reality they are instruments and outcomes of the politicisation of culture. This happens through their dependence on local politicians such as mayors and the parties dominating local councils, which agree to support the festivals financially, grant permission to use certain sites or allow them to produce noise which in other circumstances would not be permitted, in exchange for loyalty and allowing to use festivals as a means to promote political sponsors as caring ‘fathers’ of the cities they rule. Similarly, they rely on businesses which sponsor festivals in exchange for promoting their products and their ethos (Skalska 2015). In a wider sense, festivals subtly yet persuasively

promote and normalise the 'logic of neoliberalism'. Again, this is a phenomenon typical also of western festivals (Anderton 2015: 204-207). However, in Poland this type of criticism is subdued, in part due to the continuous memory of state socialism, when the intervention of politics into cultural life was more open and more contested and a generally positive attitude to capitalism on the part of the urban youth, who make up the majority of the festival audience in Poland. The logic of neoliberalism also pervades the new Polish festivals due to the fact that they rely on the free labour of thousands of volunteers, playbour, who work for the privilege of participating in a festival or in the hope that their dedication would allow them to move to paid positions (Kaczmarek 2013). Moreover, with the exception of some free festivals, Polish music festivals, as previously mentioned, tend to be expensive for an average Polish music fan, especially one who is working class, therefore they reflect and sanction the non-egalitarian class system.

Moving to the second type of criticism, it concerns the worshipping of foreign, especially western culture, at the expense of one's own and favouring established artists at the expense of newcomers. They bring memory of the uncritical deference to the West which informed the organisation of the Sopot Festival, despite its superficial privileging of socialist culture and music. Poland is also criticised for the scarcity of showcase festivals ('Showcase Festivals – dlaczego nie robimy ich w Polsce?' 2015). The only such festival, Spring Break in Poznań, is relatively new. This points to the conservative approach adopted by many Polish festivals, which ultimately leads to maintaining the status quo of the music industry in Poland.

Some of this criticism of festivals pertains less to coastal festivals than to festivals organised in large cities such as Warsaw, Krakow or Lodz. Life in coastal towns has been always organised around festival-like events, because tourists visit these towns to escape from the routine; they are liminal and carnivalesque places as Rob Shields argue (Shields 1991: 83). There festivals do not cause disruption of ordinary life because life in coastal towns is normally divided between the touristy (festival) season and the relatively quiet remainder of the year. Moreover, rather than appealing to a young and affluent audience, they have to cater for the tourist demographics, which includes families and older people. Furthermore, coastal towns typically do not require building special festival infrastructure, as they have music stages, hotels and campsites suitable for accommodating a large number of visitors.

Although festivalisation of cultural life in Poland continues at a fast pace, this is not reflected in the increased consolidation and regulation of festival life in this country. Poland does not have any government documents about its stake in the development of this form of culture. Neither do the organisers of festivals work together to ensure they all follow the same rules, exchanging information and experience, lobbying for the sustainability and improvement of festival life and avoiding dishonest competition. There is no umbrella organisation for organisers of music or any other festivals. As a director of one such festival told me, everybody works for him/herself and learns from his/her own mistakes. Despite the large number of music festivals operating in Poland after the fall of the Berlin Wall, academic research on them is modest, with a majority of studies conducted from the perspective of tourism. This scarcity also reflects the fact that due to their very number it is difficult to apply to them a bird's eye perspective, unlike in the 1960s and 1970s, when there were fewer than ten festivals to talk about and few institutions overseeing their ideological line. The bulk of discussion about Polish festivals is thus conducted by journalists and most of this discussion concerns how to choose a festival most appropriate to one's taste and pocket.

Open'er Festival

Open'er Festival takes place in Gdynia, which is part of the conurbation called Trójmiasto (Tricity), which includes also the town of Sopot, the city of Gdańsk and suburban communities, having an overall population of over a million people. Unlike Gdańsk, which with its magnificent Old City and the shipyard where the 'Solidarity revolution' began, stood for history, and Sopot which stood for leisure, Gdynia of the state socialist period and the first decade after the fall of its system lacked anything which made it instantly recognisable. This was in contrast to the period between the two World Wars, when Gdynia played an important role in its economy as a decision was made to construct a Polish seaport there, between the Free City of Danzig (Gdansk) and German Pomerania, making Gdynia the primary economic hub of the Polish Corridor. Then Gdynia became a symbol of Polish ambition to be a modern and cosmopolitan country. It is likely that the loss of the old connotations and the lack of 'brand' was one reason why in the early 2000s the city's authorities embraced with enthusiasm the idea of organising there a large music festival. In due course Open'er became one of the most important events in the city, something which Poles, or at least the younger generation of Poles, associate Gdynia with (Grabian 2012).

The festival started in 2002 under the name Open Air Festival, yet not in Gdynia, but in Warsaw, in the Stegny district. Next year, however, it was moved to Gdynia, first to Kościuszko Square and in 2007 to Babie Doły. The title declared that it will be an open air festival, both in terms of using tent-like stages and accommodating visitors who intend to spend most of their time outdoors. Open'er preserved the old connotations, yet added a suggestion that the festival opens the festival season in Poland: taking place in the first week of July, it is the first major music festival of the summer season in Poland. Currently it is the second largest popular music festival in Poland, after Przystanek Woodstock and the largest of those which sell tickets. In 2018 it had about 140,000 visitors and it was reported that it sold all its tickets before it started (Tokarczyk 2018; Gulda, Muraszko and Sandecki 2018). From its inception Open Air/Open'er Festival followed a formula tested in many international festivals, such as Glastonbury and, to some extent, the Polish Jarocin festival, on two accounts. First, it was a campsite festival, with the bulk of festival guests coming for the four days of the festival and living in a tent. Second, it flourished thanks to a close collaboration between the festival's organisers and the town's authorities, Gdynia in this case. The novelty of Open'er in the Polish context was that it took these basic ideas to a level unencountered in Poland, by rendering it a huge and well-functioning machine, adopting all the rules used in the best-known western festivals. Its greatest attraction are international stars performing on multiple stages. Over the years it hosted such acts as Bruno Mars, Depeche Mode, Gorillaz, Arctic Monkeys, Radiohead, Foo Fighters, The Weeknd, Florence + The Machine, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Coldplay, Pharrell Williams, Drake, Kasabian, Pearl Jam, Kings of Leon, Rihanna, Björk, Franz Ferdinand, The Kooks, Jay-Z, Massive Attack, The Chemical Brothers, Prince, Snoop Dogg, Pink, Fatboy Slim and the Prodigy. Many of these artists never before visited Poland, adding to Open'er's prestige.

Open'er is a collaborative endeavour between a firm Alter Art and the local authorities. The chairman of Alter Art, Mikołaj Ziółkowski, even confessed that Gdynia was chosen because the authorities there were most *open* to cooperation in this type of event. The idea was that Alter Art would take responsibility for all aspects of the festival artistic programme and organisation and the city would support the festival financially and in its relations with other institutions (Pęczak and Cieśla 2009). Of special importance are the close relations between Ziółkowski and Gdynia's President Wojciech Szczurek, who has held this office since 1998. This means that there is continuity in collaboration and good understanding between the Festival and its main patron. The city contributes about 2, 000,000 Zloties

(500,000 Euros) per year to the festival's budget, as well as helping in its organisation. Most importantly, the city rents from the army its airport Babie Doły to be used as the festival site. As Szczurek explains, this is a simpler arrangement than getting a private firm to negotiate with the army. The city authorities are also responsible for transport. It pays for free buses to carry festival-goers from the railway station to the concerts and for the extra metro trains (SKM) operating at night, at an additional cost of 300,000 Zloties, and puts up signs informing people how to get to the festival site. Hence, the city council is not so much a sponsor, as a partner of the festival. It is largely thanks to the city authorities that the Open'er comes across as a festival which is well organised and integrated into Gdynia's community life. On the other hand, its national and international success helps Szczurek to project an image of a successful politician. Of businesses Open'er tried to attract the most important was Heineken, the producer of beer, which became its main sponsor in 2006. The collaboration significantly increased the budget of the festival, allowing it to attract greatest global music stars. In exchange for the support the festival added 'Heineken' to its name, becoming Heineken Open'er Festival; yet the agreement finished in 2013 (Niezgoda 2013). Inevitably, as 'Heineken festival' Open'er openly declared its love of this brand of beer, as well as, more tacitly, its support of private companies and capitalism at large.

Apart from showing stars, the festival prides itself on its inclusivity, announcing on its website that 'Adjusting the festival venue to the needs of its participants is our priority. We want it to be a friendly place for all. Below, please find all the adjustments for the persons with disabilities', after which follows a long list of the said adjustments, such as availability of wheelchairs, parking spots and toilets for those with disabilities and the assistance of volunteers. Another advantage is its interdisciplinary or even mega-festival character, thanks to including, apart from music, screenings of films, theatre productions, fashion shows, art exhibitions, as well as, from 2018, meetings and discussion with politicians under the label Open'er Obywatelski (Civic Open'er). The perfect organisation of the festival did not go unnoticed by international observers. The Open'er twice received European Festival Awards, in 2009 and 2010 in the category of the Best Large Festival. It also received praise from the international press.

However, judging by my interviews with past visitors, as well as comments posted on various fora, not all is perfect at the Open'er. One problem concerns the sheer size and spread of the festival, which makes it tiring to move from concert to concert and makes the whole experience overwhelming, especially for ambitious visitors who don't want to miss anything

important. The second concerns a lack of a coherent artistic vision and favouring artists who have their best years behind them, as exemplified by Massive Attack, Arctic Monkeys and Gorillaz, invited in the recent years. The Open'er thus does not shape the tastes of its guests, but rather reflects the 'global, omnivore taste', nurtured by media platform such as Spotify, and panders to the nostalgia of people in their forties. Furthermore, the festival does little to promote Polish music, tacitly acknowledging it being second rate in relation to the foreign stars.

In 2018 the media also drew attention to the practice of exploitation of labour, perpetuated by the organisers of the festival. This fact was publicised by the artists and curators of an exhibition, devoted to the Polish uprisings against workers' oppression, presented during the festivals. They pointed to the fact that such oppression also takes place at the festival, where security guards are often working shifts lasting more than 10 hours, receive no food and are paid 2 Euro per hour, without any extra benefits (Sandecki 2018). One could see in it a flagrant contrast between the lofty ideals of 'civic engagement', 'inclusivity' and so on, promoted by the Open'er and the neoliberal logic of excluding and exploiting the poor workers, as this example shows. It also points to another specificity of the 'economy of festivals', namely its reliance on underpaid seasonal workers on zero-hour contracts, as well as on voluntary work, as previously mentioned. Neoliberalism creates and thrives on such a workforce and large festivals benefit from the logic of neoliberalism.

Nevertheless, most fans disillusioned with music and work practices at the Open'er will be compensated for by newcomers who will be in awe of the scale and the content of the festival, so I don't see it as a serious threat to the festival. More danger may come from any change in the political regime in Gdynia, as Open'er seems to be particularly dependent on the local politics.

Audioriver Festival

Audioriver is dedicated to electronic music, organised from 2015 in Płock, a town of 120,000 people in Central Poland, set on the banks of the Vistula river. Płock was once the capital of Poland and it was an important industrial centre during the state socialist period thanks to having the largest oil refinery in Poland. In the 1960s Płock epitomised an almost futuristic vision of Poland developing modern technologies of chemical production, rather than the old industries of coalmining and steelworks, which dominated the previous decade. Not surprisingly, here a Polish director, Jerzy Skolimowski, shot his celebrated film, *Walkower*

(*Walkover*, 1965) to show the beauty and horror of rapid industrialisation. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall any material production, be it that of coal extraction, textile production or oil refining started to look obsolete and the towns and regions associated with it tried to shed their old image, typically using culture as a way to re-imagine themselves, as previously mentioned. Płock was no exception and Audioriver became the main means to achieve this goal.

Given that the town was once at the forefront of technological advancement in Poland, it is fitting that the festival's specialism is electronic music, particularly techno, traditionally seen as music which is technophilic and futuristic. It presents its achievements over three days at the end of July on several scenes set up on the banks of the Vistula. The setting is picturesque: from one side the audience faces the river and from the other the town with its landmarks, such as old imposing churches and towers. In 2018, however, when I visited the festival, the view of the river was marred by regeneration work on its banks.

In the booklet for its 2018 edition, the festival's founder and director, Piotr Orlicz-Rabiega, announced that during the twelve years of its existence, the festival offered the audience 827 performances by 433 Polish and 394 foreign artists. From a publicist's perspective, such statistics are perfect, as they pre-empt the criticism of privileging foreign stars over home-grown talent and yet demonstrate that the festival is very cosmopolitan. Similarly, the author of the booklet announces that its purpose is to demonstrate the versatility of electronic music. This is reflected in the high number of performers in 2018 – 103, playing on 9 stages. Among them there are those who are well known to fans of electronic music, as well as others who 'enchanted us with their originality, freshness or energy.'

Orlicz-Rabiega's one-page introduction is full of anglicisms, such as 'line-up', 'timetable', 'stand-up', yet the programme itself was produced only in Polish, suggesting that he expected the bulk of visitors to come from Poland. Similarly, all the other events in which I participated, such as meetings with festival guests, were conducted in Polish. The lack of a specific strategy to attract foreign visitors might reflect the fact that Płock is more difficult to reach from abroad than the coastal towns, as it does not have its own airport and it does not have such a touristy appeal and cosmopolitan feel as Sopot, Krakow or Wrocław. According to the festival's organisers, the largest proportion of foreign guests come from Lithuania (Wojdyna 2012: 39).

In 2018 Audioriver was divided into two parts or even two festivals: a paid one, on the banks of the Vistula river, the festival proper, and one which was free, spread across the town, titled Audioriver Sobótka, from the name of the lake in the bay of the Vistula, admittedly the only place where one can swim in the waters of Vistula legally and safely.

Figure 1

Setting up a scene at Audioriver Sobótka

Figure 2

Festival guests swimming in the bay of the Vistula river

Photos Ewa Mazierska

This festival consisted of meetings with musicians, workshops for aspiring artists, displays of independent labels, screenings of films about music and art, and a photographic exhibition. Unlike the paid festival, which started every day in the evening, Audioriver Sobótka opened at the mid-day with the sounds of DJs working on their consoles. In adding Audioriver Sobótka to its programme, the organisers widened access by catering for families, who normally would not take children to concerts starting after midnight and disabled visitors who would find it difficult to negotiate numerous steep steps to the banks of the Vistula where the concerts took place. Inevitably by making these events free, it also widened participation to those who couldn't afford to buy tickets, which included a large part of Płock's population. By including workshops and meetings with musicians, the festival also provided opportunities for citizen participation beyond listening and dancing to music, as during such events the guests (among whom were some aspiring musicians) could ask artists questions about the secrets of music production and improve their wellbeing by learning how to use one's body in a more musical way or how to build a microphone, as these were the topics of some of the workshops offered to visitors. Overall, by merging Audioriver with Audioriver Sobótka the organisers better connected the city with the festival.

I have no statistical data on the demographics of the guests attending the main festival, but my impression was that they were between twenty and thirty years old, urban and quite affluent, as judged by their appearance, hence conforming to the typical profile of a

campsite festival in Poland (Piasecka 2012). This can be also deduced from the high price of the festival tickets. The majority of them lived on the campsite, adjoining the site of the festival, near the Sobótka lake; others were housed in local hotels. I also saw a 'wild camp' behind one of Płock's hotels, presumably set up by those unwilling to pay the camp fee and people sleeping in their cars. The guests were mainly Polish. Only on a couple of occasions I heard German. There is thus a slight mismatch between the type of audience the festival attracts, which is almost mainly Polish and the cosmopolitan character of its music.

The comments about the festival I managed to collect were generally positive. Several people from Płock admitted that this is the most important cultural event in their town which 'puts Płock on the map'. This is of special significance as they feel that their town, despite its proud history, is neglected by the political authorities and cultural elites. The visitors from other cities were also satisfied. They praised the line-up, which allowed them to see international stars of electronic music, such as Bonobo, and Polish acts, which proved to be of a similar standard. They appreciated the fact that both the foreign and Polish artists were treated similarly, unlike other Polish festivals, where the latter were relegated to the worst slots and least prestigious stages. The participants also praised the good organisation and friendly atmosphere. Although one could see that apart from the large quantity of beer some vodka was consumed, largely Polish Żubrówka from small bottles, but I saw few drunken people at the festival camp and in the city.

What were the downsides of the festival? First, the main festival is not family friendly. In principle, it only allows guests who are 18 years or older. Bringing a child to a concert requires a complicated procedure which few potential visitors are willing to undertake. The same goes for disabled people. The very location of the festival on the river bank requires descending (and then ascending) numerous steep steps, which is very difficult for people with impaired movement. However, as I mentioned earlier, Audioriver Sobótka did not have such a barrier to participation and I saw there two people in wheelchairs, as well as kids dancing to the energetic rhythms of techno. The festival also disrupts, to some extent, the lives of the locals and ordinary tourists. To prevent a non-paying audience to see the stages from a good vantage point, it fenced-off some areas which otherwise would be available to the public or easy to reach, such as the square with one of the monuments or the Sobótka lake. A day before the festival I heard a local family cursing the festival because it frustrated their fishing trip to the lake.

My own frustration was over some scheduled events and communication with the festival. The meetings with invited guests were in the festival tent situated in the market square, in close proximity to the main DJ set. As a result, the noise emitted by the music made it difficult to participate in the discussion. The public discussion ‘Quo Vadis Techno’ proved not to be available to the festival audience at all, because it was to be broadcast by radio. As a result, the participants used headphones and microphones and the rest couldn’t hear them. I was also unable to communicate with the organisers, whom I wanted to interview for this chapter – there is an e-mail address for this purpose on the festival’s website, but it didn’t work. There were also people deployed on the site who were meant to help the visitors, possibly volunteers, but they were not well informed.

Another problem was accommodation. It transpired that Płock was not prepared for such an influx of tourists. When I tried to book a hotel for myself and my teenage son the only hotel available cost over two hundred GBP per day. After two days of deliberation I decided to book this hotel after all, but by then the only available room had gone and there was nothing available in Płock at all, except for the campsite. I would miss Audioriver if not for the fact that I was helped by a colleague working in the local university who arranged for us accommodation for university guests.

Observing the last preparations and the activities at the Audioriver Festival also confirmed my opinion that large campsite festivals are the opposite of ‘green’. The first was reflected in the heavy machinery deployed to set up the festival venues. The landscape brought to mind the Soviet ambitions to build a new city in one day. However, the Soviet cities were built to stay, while the city of Audioriver only existed for three days. Second, the festival encouraged excessive waste. Over the three days I saw numerous heaps of rubbish: mostly plastic and glass bottles, cans, pizza boxes, plastic bags and paper. Moreover, unlike camp festivals proper, which have special places for putting rubbish, festival such as Audioriver, which takes place both on the campsite and in the city, made both of these sites dirty. One can see a mismatch between the technophilia of electronic music on the one hand, with its faith in technology being able to solve the problems of civilisation and these problems, most importantly rubbish, so conspicuously displayed in Płock. However, in this respect Audioriver is not alone – sustainability is a challenge few festivals in the world are able to meet (Rymajdo 2019).

Jazz na Molo

The Jazz na Molo (Jazz on the Pier) Festival takes place in Sopot, which is the most famous Polish seaside resort, boasting the longest wooden pier in Europe, the Grand Hotel, which hosted hundreds of important guests and many beautiful buildings with wooden ornaments, most of them dating from the times when Sopot belonged to Germany. During the state socialist period Sopot was the host to the most important Polish festival from the perspective of showcasing Polish popular culture on the international stage – the Sopot International Song Contest. Currently Sopot has over 20 music festivals, probably the highest number of music festivals per capita in Poland, given that its population is only about 37,000 and going down, and that its neighbours, Gdansk and Gdynia, have many festivals too, including the giant Open'er.

What is characteristic of Sopot's festivals, apart from their sheer number, is that many are openly mainstream and commercial, and other are nostalgic and appeal to the older audience. This reflects the specific circumstances of Sopot: it attracts large numbers of tourists and most of them can be described as 'mainstream': looking for the ultimate pleasures of a seaside resort, with its crowded main street (Monte Cassino) and pier lined with shops with tacky souvenirs, rather than trying to escape civilisation or indulge in niche interests.

The Jazz on the Pier is the most modest festival of the three discussed in this article in terms of its financial resources, the number of people involved in its organisation and the size of the audience. It has no dedicated website and its sponsors do not exceed ten and most of them are the media and local businesses, such as 'Sopot' hotel in the neighbouring town of Kamienny Potok. Meaningfully, it receives no money from the political authorities of Sopot or Tricity. Consequently, it can be described as the most 'independent', although, according to the festival's artistic director, Marcin Jacobson, he would be more than happy to receive funds from the city. The main barrier is its location on grounds administered by a private firm, the PTH Kąpielisko Morskie.

The festival lasts for three days and uses only one stage, 'Muszla Concertowa' (Concert Conch) near the pier (hence its name Jazz on the Pier) and due to its proximity to a large Sheraton hotel it has restrictions on noise – all concerts have to finish at 10 p.m., therefore it can offer only up to 5 hours of music per day and its line-up is about 20 performers or bands; this was also the case in 2018. These constraints reinforce each other – the limited funding goes hand in hand with limitations on time, number of performers and the

size of the audience. The Concert Conch's capacity is about three hundred, but it is not the limit of Jazz on the Pier festival audience, as people can watch the concerts standing nearby. At the performances I attended all places were taken and at the most popular concerts people congregated around the seats in large numbers.

The Jazz on Pier Festival positions itself as a successor to the oldest jazz festival in Poland and Eastern Europe, which took place in 1956, shortly after the death of the Stalinist leader, Bolesław Bierut and before the ascent of his successor, Władysław Gomułka, which started a cultural and political 'thaw' in Poland. How large this festival was one can appreciate from the size of its audience, which counted between 30,000 and 50,000 people, coming to Sopot, whose population was merely 5,000 people at the time. Among the performers was Krzysztof Komeda, in subsequent years the most famous Polish jazz musician nationally and internationally. The political and cultural significance of this first jazz festival cannot be overestimated – it connoted an immense quest for freedom and connection with western, principally American, culture. Two years later the festival was moved to Warsaw under the name Jazz Jamboree. Jazz on the Pier was born in 1996, on the 40th anniversary of the 1956 festival. Its purpose was to show the noble heritage of Polish jazz, as well as its connections with global jazz culture. For this reason, each edition features veterans of Polish jazz, such as Jan 'Ptaszyn' Wróblewski and Marianna Wróblewska.

Figure 3

Audience at Jazz on Pier Festival

Figure 4

New Orleans pageant

Photos Ewa Mazierska

Jacobson, who became the festival's artistic director in 2013, has built on this tradition. For this reason, the festival's programme tries to include what is best in the old and new jazz of Tricity, as well as in the country and abroad. This was indeed the case in 2018, when one could see bands consisting of veterans playing with young and upcoming performers. As well as building on the tradition, Jacobson introduced some innovations. They resulted from his recognition that Jazz on the Pier is a 'resort festival', which needs to cater for the tastes of people who might not be particularly interested in jazz music, but only regard listening to it as an additional attraction to sunbathing, swimming and eating out. His first

innovation was to have a ‘dancing jazz’ night, which – as its name suggests – offered danceable music. In 2018 one could also see many people dancing or at least moving to the rhythm of music, not unlike in Audioriver. As well as the main programme, which lasted for three days, between 5.30 p.m. and 10 p.m., the festival included some extras. One of them was a ‘New Orleans pageant’, which consisted of old cars moving through the main street to the accompaniment of traditional jazz tunes. On top of that there were jam sessions at the ‘Sopot’ hotel. As Jacobson confessed, this event was mainly for the musicians, who in this way had a chance to play with each other and relieve the stress of public performance. In 2018, the festival also included an exhibition of the leading photographer of Polish jazz musicians, Marek Karewicz, who recently passed away. The photo of Karewicz also adorned the stage. The pageant and the exhibition marks Jazz on Pier as a ‘heritage festival’, which afford the audience a certain kind of cultural capital.

The audience of Jazz on Pier was more varied than that at Audioriver, similarly as a crowd of holidaymakers walking the main street in a seaside resort is more varied than of people arriving at a specific event. Nevertheless, what was specific was the large number of older people, those in their sixties, seventies or even eighties. Judging from my conversations with them, they belonged to the Tricity intelligentsia, who had nurtured their passion for jazz music for many decades. For them, the attraction of the festival was two-fold – it allowed them to indulge in nostalgia, as well as educate themselves in new trends in jazz. Given that this stratum of the population lives on a rather modest income, it is especially important that the festival was free. I believe that the majority of them would not be able to attend if they had to pay as much as the audience at Open’er and Audioriver. I also talked to the young visitors. Most of them were budding musicians, including some performing at the festival and their friends, who identified themselves as being passionate about jazz. Irrespective of age, my informants proved to be very satisfied with all aspects of the festival and some admitted that it got better year after year.

Conclusions

The three festivals I discussed in this chapter come across as different from the music festivals dominating in the state socialist period due to being supported by private companies and local authorities and hence, accountable only to these sponsors, rather than any central institutions. They are also different in being multi-event festivals and encouraging active participation, rather than watching and listening to performers from the comfort of the seats

in front of the stage or the couches located opposite the television sets. They are on an upward trajectory, every year attracting a larger audience, more attractions and at least sustaining their budget. It looks like their future will be bright, especially as despite the large number of music festivals taking place in Poland, this number is still rather modest in comparison with some other European countries. Furthermore, although their ticket prices are quite high for a Polish audience, they are competitive in comparison with other European countries, hence most likely are attractive to foreign guests. This success, however, with the possible exception of the Jazz on Pier Festival, is built on the work of numerous 'neoliberal workers': unpaid, underpaid and mostly invisible.

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